



SKILLSUSA NATIONAL COMPETITORS, FROM LEFT, ADVISER TOM ROSEN FROM THE DEHRYL A. DENNIS PTE CENTER; ALBERTO VILLARREAL, CARPENTRY COMPETITOR AND BORAH HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE; MITCH LOKKER, PRECISION MACHINING COMPETITOR AND CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR; ERIC MUNSON, COMPETITOR IN ELECTRONICS TECHNOLOGY AND CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR; BEN DECAMP, INTERNETWORKING COMPETITOR AND BORAH HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE; AND AMBER MARONA, COMPETITOR IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS CABLING AND TIMBERLINE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR. DECAMP TOOK GOLD IN INTERNETWORKING.

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## **'No. 1 nerd' brings home national gold Ben DeCamp gets top marks in Internetworking**

After Ben DeCamp won the Skills USA state competition this spring, he said there was no sense in going to the national competition — held last month in Kansas City — if he wasn't going to win.

DeCamp, who graduated in May from Borah High School and also studied at the Dehryl A. Dennis Professional Technical Education Center, did just that. He took home a gold medal in "Internetworking."

In layman's terms — and layman's terms are fairly rare among the Skills USA crowd, where those "skills" include things like "TechPrep-Scientific Research, Engineering and Tech Service" — DeCamp's specialty is "getting networks to talk to each other."

He picked up his prize June 24 in Kansas City's Kemper Arena in front of an audience including 4,700 fellow Skills USA competitors, their families and advisers, not to mention seven members of his family, who packed into cars and drove all the way to Missouri to cheer DeCamp on.

The moment when everyone knew DeCamp had won was "just amazing," said his mom, Dora DeCamp. The DeCamp clan heard the name of the bronze medalist, then the name of the silver medalist. No Ben. "Well, OK, we thought," said Dora DeCamp, "he didn't win." Then her son's name came up on the big screen, and the family exploded into hugs and "hollering."

"Ben was so funny on the stand," his mother said. He raised his hand in a "V" for victory, she said, but then "did that rock and roll 'shake your head' thing. It cracked everybody up. Yep, we said, that's Ben."

Tom Rosen was DeCamp's adviser at the Dennis Center. He traveled to Kansas City with the team. "Out of 10,000 people in Kemper Arena," Rosen said, "there were two of us who thought Ben was going to win" — himself and DeCamp. It wasn't a question of arrogance, he said, just confidence.

All week long, people had been warning him not to get DeCamp's hopes up, Rosen said. DeCamp was competing against 60 students from all over the country.

DeCamp said all of the tasks in his category were typically things that someone who's been studying Internetworking would know how to do. But in competition, quality and speed are what's at issue.

In Kansas City, DeCamp said, he found himself doing tasks in 20 minutes that took twice that long in the state competition.

"The national competition is hard-core," he said.

DeCamp has a social life, a girlfriend, and a fondness for movies, Frisbee golf and floating the river, he said. But since May, when he won the state competition, he'd been studying an hour every night to get ready.

"I've pretty much been a nerd these past few months," he admitted.

But then he was always a kid who knew his way around electronics, his mom said.

When he was 18 months old, he figured out how to change the tapes in the VCR, even though "the tape was half as big as he was," Dora DeCamp can.

Then, when he was 8 years old, a friend gave the DeCamps a computer. That sealed Ben DeCamp's fate. He decided he wanted to change the screen wallpaper. He grabbed a "Computers for Dummies" book that had come with the machine and started reading.

"I went to bed that night," his mom said, and "when I got up in the morning, the wallpaper was different. There's been no stopping Ben since."

Much of his know-how has come from necessity, DeCamp said. He came to the realization long ago that when he wanted certain things — like high-speed Internet in his bedroom, for example — he wasn't likely to get them unless he built them, wired them or created them for himself.

Along with the gold medal, new computer equipment and scholarships, DeCamp gets to travel to San Jose, Calif., in August to spend a day at Cisco Systems, the computer company that sponsors the Skills USA event. DeCamp also has a fulltime job at Healthwise and will attend Boise State this fall.

Four of DeCamp's classmates — Alberto Villarreal, Mitch Lokker, Eric Munson and Amber Marona — rounded out the Dennis Center team. Students from Meridian Charter High School and Boise State University also took home medals from Kansas City.

"This is a really nice thing," said Rosen, "for Idaho to come and win a competition that's been dominated by Eastern states."

After DeCamp's big win, his mom said he was "blown away," a state of being that involved talking to his grandparents with a big grin on his face, insisting that the whole experience was "so crazy," and that he was now, officially, "the No. 1 nerd in the nation."